DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 059 847 RE 004 023

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TITLE	The Beginning College Reader.
PUB DATE	Dec 71
NOTE	7p.; Paper presented at the National Reading Conference, Tampa, Fla., Dec. 1971
AVAILABLE FROM	National Reading Conference, Inc., Marquette University, 1217 W. Wisconsin Ave., Milwaukee, Wis. 53233
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	College Admission; *College Programs; College Students; Educationally Disadvantaged; *Individualized Instruction; *Open Enrollment; Reading Improvement; *Reading Instruction; Reading Programs; Reading Skills; *Study Skills

ABSTRACT

Students entering colleges under open-enrollment plans require special kinds of help from instructors of college reading and study skills programs. Such students often have poor scholastic records and only moderate interest in academic pursuits. They need highly individualized attention to the particular problems they experience with reading and positive reinforcement of capabilities they possess. A Kentucky college program designed to meet the needs of open enrollment students uses small class groups to insure time for one-to-one instructor/student interaction. A variety of materials are made available for use, and emphasis is placed on planning individual student programs based on need. After 4 years of operation which included modifications when needed, the program was judged to have been successful in that open-enrollment students were graduating from the college. (MS)

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RE 004 023

THE BEGINNING COLLEGE READER

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(A paper presented at the 1971 National Reading Conference Annual Convention, Miami, Florida, on December 4, 1971 as part of a symposium "Differentiated Reading Programs for Five Types of Adult Learners.")

The National Reading Conference is, of course, concerned basically with reading in college and with the adult reading area. The beginning college reader, however, can be treated as a specific adult type and is so considered for the purposes of this paper.

In a paper presented at NRC last year, Dulin and Quealy wrote, "The adult learner who comes to a college class brings with him a good many relatively "set" patterns of behavior, and whatever steps we take to change or alter these will of necessity be adaptive, not total. Much

as we'd sometimes like to, we're rarely going to completely reverse a student's life-style or substantially substitute our own values, ideals, and aspirations for his. Generally speaking, the improvements we'll be successful in making in an adult learner's reading, academic aptitudes, and/or intellectual-cultural involvements will be built-upon, not substitutive for, his own current cognitive style, his own current aspirations and interests, and his own current view of himself and his relationship to the world of words.

Because of this, the more recent research in adult educational diagnosis has tended to shift from what Wark called "Dean Data"--progress report type information about differences between incoming and outgoing performances of groups--or what we might designate as "Norm Data"--searches for larger and larger pools of base-line information--to study of individual self-concept, personal self-expectations, and the inter-relationships between idiosyncratic cognitive styles and concomitant personality variables as they affect learning. Thus, diagnostic techniques incorporating analyses of individual learning styles with opportunities for applying the results of these analyses to realistic learning tasks would appear to be much more productive and useful than are simple assessments of survey data like overall rate, general comprehension level, and the normative appraisal of recognition-level vocabulary."[1].

This paper will attempt to describe a study skills program based upon these assumptions and contentions conducted at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.

The study skills program is composed of a series of seven single class-hour lecture-demonstrations with the following titles:

Analysis of Ineffective Study Habits and Use of Scheduling Study
The SQ3R Technique, the Most Effective Method of Study
The Art of Note Taking
Analysis of Individual Students Learning Style Through Use of a Standardized Instrument
Vocabulary Development, Techniques and Materials
Preparing for and Taking Examinations
Skimming, Skanning, and Speed Reading

The course is a non-credit elective and is offered in multiple sections 4 times per academic year. Enrollments are limited to twenty-five students per section and more than 300 students are accommodated during an academic year. The program is maintained on self-sustaining funding.

Last year four video tapes were made on topics 1, 2, 3 and 4 which have been used with half of this year's new sections in an attempt to reassure difference in effectiveness between live and video presentations.

The first topic and first video tape is titled "Analysis of Ineffective Study Habits and Use of Scheduling in Study." I will attempt to describe how this presentation affects the beginning college reader in terms of adaptive behavior.

The core of the presentation revolves around the concept of "avoidance patterns" which is defined as repeated or habitual activities on the part of the student which result in diminishing of concentration while studying or which results in the student ceasing to study altogether.

Examples of avoidance patterns are illustrated on the tape. Currently those avoidance patterns cited are the nicotine fit, the hunger pang, the communications break, the uncontrolled break, the sleep syndrome, and the non-organizational pattern. These labels are attempts on the part of the author to present easily identifiable samples for consideration by college freshmen to help them to ferret out and specify their own particular limitations in this area. In order to move students away from the vapid generalization with which so many tumble from day to day - semester to semester -

saying, "I'm really going to get serious about studying after the football season, after the dance, after the election, after the whatever," it is recommended that each student attempt to introspect his study habits and label limitations as specifically and as concretely as possible.

Let me illustrate by using the nicotine fit avoidance pattern. Students who smoke are urged to answer the question "Are you smoking more and studying less?" At the end of an evening of study, how many cigarette butts are there in the ash tray? How long does it take you typically to smoke a cigarette? Multiply the average time one takes times the number of butts in the ash tray. Subtract this from your total study time. Do you feel that this represents an unreasonable amount of time? If so, attack the nicotine fit avoidance pattern now instead of engaging in fantasies of studying more and better sometime in the indefinite future.

In all avoidance patterns, a simple two-step process is recommended, first recognition and secondly control. Most students report that the first step is the more difficult: to admit the existance of a specific limitation. Once the limitation has been specified, patterns of control can be attempted. In the case being illustrated, students have reported a variety of control patterns which are discussed by students in subsequent sessions. Breaking cigarettes in half, limiting the number taken to the study situation and using the cigarette as a reward for the accomplishment of a self prescribed goal in study are three of the many suggested by students. The last is an example of what some might consider an application of behavior modification theory.

Each of the avoidance patterns listed here is taken from a different area of behavior. Some of these patterns could be reasonably designated as psychological, physiological or sociological. The hunger pang syndrome

is most easily illustrated by the response of one Eau Claire freshman. As a dormitory student on the university food plan, he observed that although he consumed the same relative quantity and quality of food daily, he only was conscious of being hungry and needing a snack on study evenings. On Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, he felt no hunger pangs until midnight pizza snack time. On Mondays through Thursdays, hunger pangs drove him to the Blue Gold room, a campus cafeteria, somewhere around nin o'clock in the evening from which he failed habitually to return to study. His self initiated pattern of control was simply 1) take a snack to the room and 2) ignore any subsequent temptation of go to the Blue Gold until study was completed for the evening. Of the more than 1,200 students who have taken the program, every one has reported some difficulty with the communications break syndrome. It appears that college students are disturbed by the "sounds of silence." Many found that after very brief periods of study, they would create a communications need. "I must call Bill now." "I forgot to tell Joan", etc., etc. Many students reported yielding to communications breaks thrust upon them. "Jim knocked on my door and said everyone is going down to the Barrio. I really should stay and study but I can't help it if I'm so popular." Control patterns here are self evident. Once again, the first step "recognition" is clearly the way to a solution of the avoidance pattern.

Blank time slot study schedules covering an entire week are provided for each student. It is suggested that each student fill in all the time slots which are fixed in the schedule including part time work and recreation. He is then advised to plan a study schedule from the remaining hours. Three time periods are brought to his attention. First late afternoons — How do you use the time between your last daily class and dinner hour? I found it

surprising that so many college freshmen spent a quarter to three-quarters of an academic year apparently locked in to a high school study pattern where only evening hours were used for study. It was urged that students who had never done so try afternoon study. The second period recommended for evaluation was late morning free time. The time slot analysis and class discussion revealed that most beginning college readers simply "goofed around" or "laid around" when no class was scheduled until 10 or 11 a.m. This was the first time in their lives that these early a.m.s were non-scheduled for them. The third period was the weekend. Students reported that weekend study was limited to future probability and good intentions. In applying patterns of control, many students reported that when they specifically prescribed certain hours for weekend study, they were able to accomplish just as much in terms of shopping, dating, recreation and the like, while finding more study hours available in their weeks.

Every college reading instructor who has worked in the study skills area, has heard students say, "I'm falling behind in my work. Teach me to read faster." It appears that consciously specifying a greater number of hours per week for study is a partial solution at least to this problem.

This paper has been an attempt to describe a study skills program designed for the beginning college reader. The program is an example of an effort to more fully utilize introspection in adapting study behavior of beginning college students.

The plethora of materials for the college student in the study skills areas is constantly increasing. Many of these packages contain materials which work in highly discreet sub-skills through some type of programmed technique with or without the aid of a media device. Although there is obvious proven merit for this approach I fear the American propensity for

packaging and programming may overwhelm us if we continue to move in that direction only. It appears to me that the role of introspection combined with discussion is a road which needs more use. Perhaps it will be of better worth.

The beginning college student faces many challenges. Hopefully a variety of avenues will become available to him in the area of study skills because it is his awareness of his strengths upon which he must capitalize and his weaknesses for which he must compensate which will best enable him to achieve his potential. Henry Adams wrote — "What one knows in youth is of little import: he knows enough who knows how to learn."

(1) Dulin, Kenneth L., and Quealy, Roger J., "Diagnosis and Prediction of Reading Performance at the Adult Level," Reading: The Right to Participate, National Reading Conference (1971) 54.